



UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' TAKE ON EVALUATION EFFECTIVENESS FOR COHERENT COURSE OUTCOME

Asmita Pal¹ and Bonamali Pal^{2*}

¹Student of BA Psychology, Thapar School of Liberal Arts and Sciences and ^{2*}School of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, Patiala, Punjab 147004, India

Email id: apal_blas21@thapar.edu

doi: 10.48047/ecb/2023.12.si4.1174

Abstract: Individuals refine the power of creative thinking by applying their knowledge and competencies through a deeper understanding and unique take on the topic. Recent pedagogical approaches focus on shaping the creative power of the individual acquiring knowledge in their specific domain of interest and enabling them to apply their hands-on expertise in the day-to-day tasks and job field. The effectiveness of the learning and the absorption of the course objective is often judged using educational assessments. However, the idea of the assessment purpose is more complicated than assumed. The purpose of the evaluation for the course design lies at three different levels of analysis, often the – measurement level, decision level, and impact level. Hence special attention is needed to be paid to the mode of the assessment. Recently, the debate between the effectiveness of exam evaluation vs. assignment-based evaluations has arisen; with technology and a focus on holistic development, both modes have evolved with many pros and cons. Though the teaching method lies at the core of achieving the course outcome, the analysis and efforts done by the students are better predictors of the course's effectiveness. Pedagogical differences and classroom size often hinder the judgment of the practical student's absorption of the course learning. Coupled with anxiety and rising competition often, communication is not fruitful in the course designs. Many a time, it is also seen that grade increment policy adopted by institutes seems to provide biased results; for example, grade increment policy was caught on the rise during the times of covid in the secondary education systems to deliver desirable and accessible results for the students, thus neglecting the students' understanding into the courses offered. However, in the colleges, the fear of positive teacher evaluation by the students has pushed teachers to mark students on a higher side of the grade scale, especially in the exam-based assessment. Hence through this paper, we try to derive data and information from the students from different disciplines at an institute with majors offered in engineering, sciences, business, and social sciences to look into the student's insight for better evaluation practices to gain the course's effective outcome.

Keywords: Evaluation effectiveness; Assessment perception; Course absorption; Conceptual outcome; Learning approach.

1. Introduction

Education aims to prepare students with valuable knowledge about their complex skill and soft skills. Hence, seeking education is to make an individual develop core knowledge and abstract thinking abilities to prepare them for the future application of their knowledge. Understanding the student's learning in educational contexts must consider the student's construction of reality. The reality, as experienced by the student, has significant added value. This assumption also applies to a student's evaluation and assessment understanding. Students' research about the modes of examination or assessment used does not solely determine behaviour. Students' perceptions of evaluation methods are also important. The fear and the wide variety of reviews have been seen to increase recently. New modes of assessment have enriched the 'conventional' evaluation setting, which was previously characterized by both multiple-choice examinations and traditional essay evaluations. Portfolios, self and peer assessment, simulations, and other innovative methods have recently been introduced in higher education contexts. The current evaluation context is made up of these concepts. Students' perceptions of evaluation are especially crucial in understanding as evaluation anxiety and competition may result in using

"strategies" to pass the course instead of effectively using the technique for future use. Hence the approaches students use to learn a topic becomes necessary to be discussed, as how a student thinks about learning and studying influences how he approaches assignments and evaluation activities. In contrast, the learner's evaluation and assessment experience influences how the student approaches (future) learning.

Students' approach to learning material can be put forward in three ways: the first is gaining a surface-level overview of the course to tackle the evaluation at the front; hence the learning is done due to the external imposition. Therefore, the assessment would merely test the knowledge that could be retrieved at the given moment. The outcome of this approach essentially leads to cramming up information without enabling them to perceive the larger picture. The second approach could be the deeper level analysis of the topic due to the student's enduring disposition. This approach gives them a practical and conceptual analysis of the matter, allowing them to apply and see it in real life. For example, a social psychology student could use the principles of attitude dissonance in typical day-to-day conversations if they learned the subject with their interest. The last approach could be the repeated analysis of the course topic to achieve the highest possible grades, thus leading to the adoption of various study methods to put forward the academic discourse in the best possible way. Thus a semantic recording of the information is taking place to retain and retrieve that information. Though one could see errors and biases in these approaches, these are not to be perceived as stringent categorization; instead, these approaches provide ample opportunity for getting familiar with the core concepts to the students and also gives insights into the student mindset. However, the instructor needs to keep in mind these approaches to better design the evaluation strategies, which reflect the student's conceptual and practical knowledge gained from the discursive intercourse of the classroom.

Studies by Marton and Säljö (1997) described how perceived evaluation induces surface-level scratching of a text presented to people, where the attempt to render the deeper level analysis instead made the candidates focus on the structural level of the text instead of grasping the concept behind it. Hence, the evaluation guidelines must be coherent with the text's deeper-level scratching. For instance, in most of the objective test patterns, students can be seen to remember a set of paired words that are sufficient to answer the tests, whereas, in a subjective test pattern, the information presented had to be aligned with the concept to be judged.

1.1 Perception of assessment

Recent pedagogical discourse has focused on conceptual and higher-order thinking development built upon the academic knowledge conveyed in the educational setup. The role of assessment is to evaluate the students' course absorption and the teacher's ability to successfully impart the knowledge to bring in the desired changes in the students. However, the perception of assessment with increased competition and educational quality audits has come to be renewed. The focus is now on the assessment being a tool to assess the readiness of the students instead of it being merely done for judging the retention of the topics. Thus, there has been a shift to the individual's holistic development with avenues created by the course rather than just on grades themselves. Apart from the whims of the examiner, numerous additional factors have been demonstrated to impact grades. Gunn (1993), for example, discovered a favorable relationship between attendance and final course grades. The consistently attending student may not be motivated by the instructor, but attendance may be connected to the student's motivation, which may be developed internally. Subjecting the student to an assessment method that elicits a favorable response from the student may be a significant contributor to a student's performance, and the use to which a specific assessment technique may be put will rely, to some extent, on the student's impressions of it. In light of the need to find efficiencies in teaching and the potential role of assessment in motivating students, their impressions of various assessment procedures will be investigated. Gender and age characteristics, which have been found to impact evaluation concerns, are particularly relevant. Birenbaum and Feldman (1998) observed that students with substantial learning abilities and high academic performance confidence prefer essays to multiple-choice assessments. On the other hand, students with weak learning abilities and little confidence in their academic competence prefer the choice over the constructed-response kind of evaluation. The findings also reveal that low exam anxiety levels are associated with good sentiments regarding the essay format.

It is, however, quite the general scenario that evaluations are merely perceived as the indicator of student achievement. The methods aimed to prevent pure cramming could not be eliminated from the assessments. Still, efforts can be made to grade the learning to be coherent with the desirable outcome. Assessments through a critical indicator in the learning process are one of the key factors in developing rote learning practices and inducing mental stress in students due to external expectations and burdens faced by the students. Not only this, but also the approaches discussed in the previous section provides a much more straightforward example of why improper evaluations could instead result in a hindrance in the job field due to a lack of conceptual knowledge. Studies also show how the thought of future evaluation diminishes a more profound learning level. According to Zeidner (1992), for any evaluation to help influence study behavior and provide a source of motivation, it must relate to acceptable study behavior, give thorough course coverage, occur frequently, and be tied to the course grade. Thus there is a proposal for higher-order and perhaps even practical evaluations, which essentially the students perceive positively. For example, a marketing student won't provide justice to the course outcome even after higher grades in an essay or MCQ-based evaluation unless they can create that branding effect of any product asked. In a 1997 study by Sambell, students were asked to evaluate novel kinds of assessment, and their perceptions of the educational value of assessment altered frequently and substantially. An alternative evaluation was seen to improve rather than degrade the quality of learning. Numerous people pointed out that for alternative evaluations, instead of simply memorizing or habitually documenting the stuff being studied, they were directing their efforts toward attempting to comprehend it. Hence novel assessments and even task-based evaluations are increasingly perceived to be less monotonous and provide better internalization of the subject studied. This study also proved that the student's perception of the assessments led to better self-efficacy about themselves and also reported to be more nurturing on a deeper level and prompted higher-order thinking.

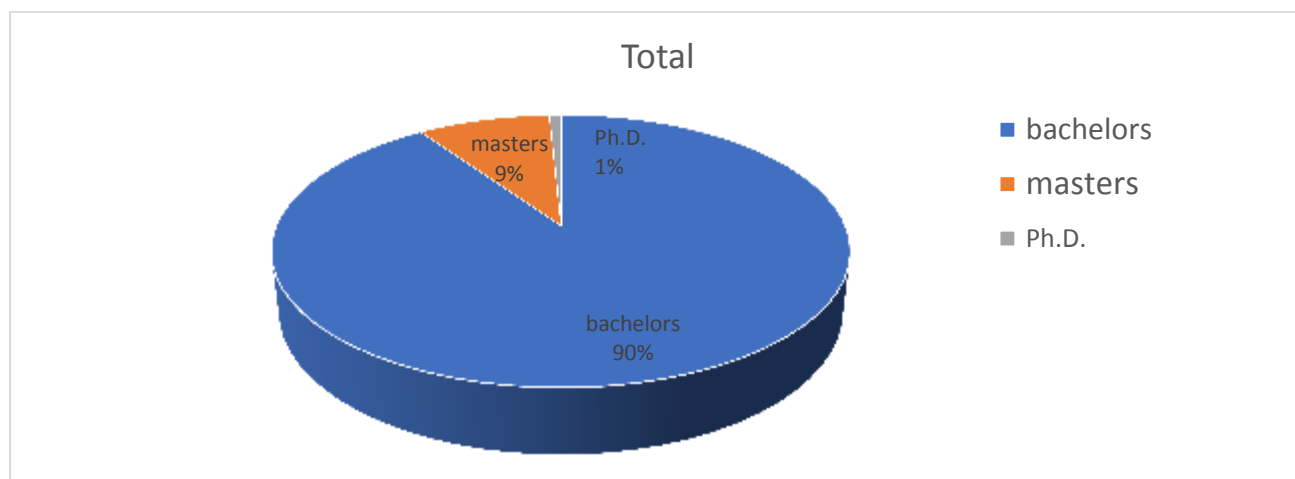
Although classroom sizes, biases, and subjectivity pose problems in the creation of this large-scale evaluation, however a shift to assignment-based assessment is seen in the recent day and age, which is often perceived to be in a favorable manner by the students as often time-bound exams tend to create stress and impact performance. The need for discursive action to be taken due to the intrinsic motivation and pleasure by the students remains critical in promoting higher order deeper analysis of the topics discussed. Hence the instructor's job becomes more challenging to encourage the classroom discussions to be as interactive as possible and be creative with the evaluation methods.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects

The participants in the survey were majorly from undergraduate and postgraduate programs in a particular institute pursuing various majors like engineering, sciences, and humanities. The subjects were in the age group of 17 – 33. A total of 374 respondents' data was collected and analyzed. Gender differences are not pondered upon in this study. The questionnaire was distributed and designed via google forms and was shared with the students who could be potential participants. Participation was voluntary. The following chart shows the percentage of the participants enrolled in either bachelor's or master's degrees

Figure 1: Pie chart distribution for the current degree enrolment of the subjects.



Convenient sampling was done to ensure the students were chosen from a particular institute where principal exam-based evaluations occur. However, due to time constraints, the sample size was relatively small compared to the total university population. The sample contained students within a range of CGPA (cumulative grade point average) of 4.5 – 10. The mean for the data of CGPA was 8.1.

2.2 Questionnaire

The online survey contained 19 open-ended, multiple-choice, and rating scale questions in a mixed format. All the questions were mandatory to be answered. Basic information on the majors being pursued and the Cumulative grade point average was also included to obtain a general insight into the candidates.

The open-ended question was included to derive the students' viewpoint from justifying their choice on the multiple choice questions. The rating scale questions were designed to identify the degree of emotions they feel about the inevitable evaluation process.

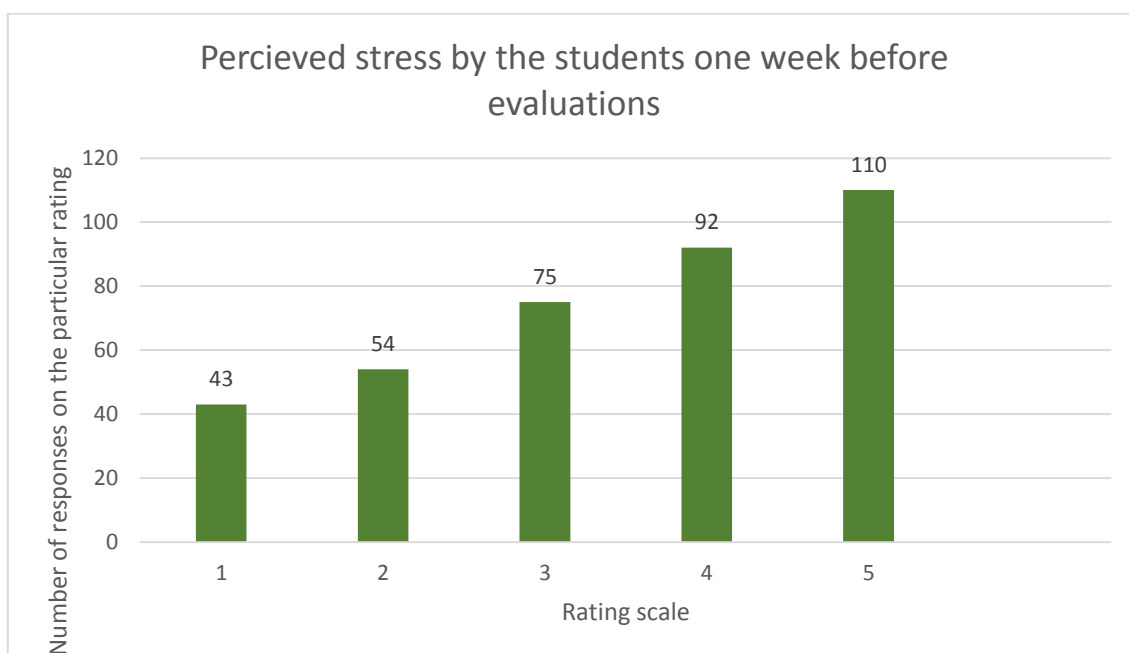
The following is the link to the questionnaire:

Students' perception of evaluation

3. Results

The data of the students analyzed seemed to suggest that the majority of the student felt more anxious during the previous week of the examination. Most of the students frequently face exam-based evaluations every 2- 3 months. However, there are some variations in the evaluation frequency reported among the students, mainly due to the varying majors and programs they are enrolled in. The anxiety could potentially threaten the perception of the examinations as not fruitful and not aligned with the course outcome. Though the participants offered an answer that the majority (approximately 65% of the subjects) engage in class discussions and scrutinize the course plan and the outcomes, most of the students feel that exam-based evaluations often fail to serve the purpose of the course. The following graph is a representation of overwhelmed emotions felt by the students before examinations. The ratings clearly shows the perceived evaluation anxiety by the students with maximum participants rating extremely overwhelmed feeling being caused by the onset of evaluations.

Figure 2: rating the perceived stress during evaluations.



When asked about the student's behavior in analyzing the course, they seemed to take a moderate stance. Still, the students answered that external motivation allows for better engrossment with the course.

Figure 3: Rating of students' behavior of the discourse analysis and study behavior.

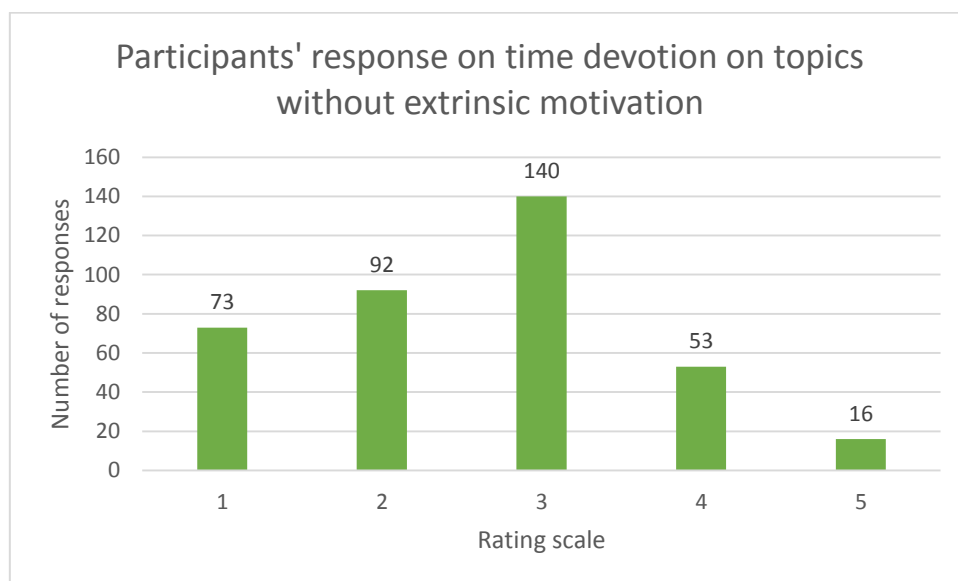
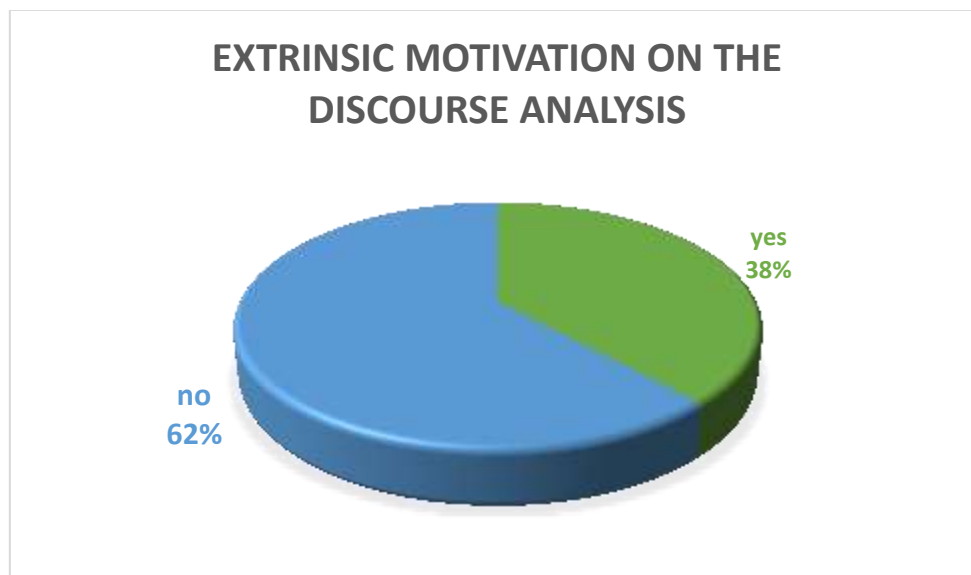


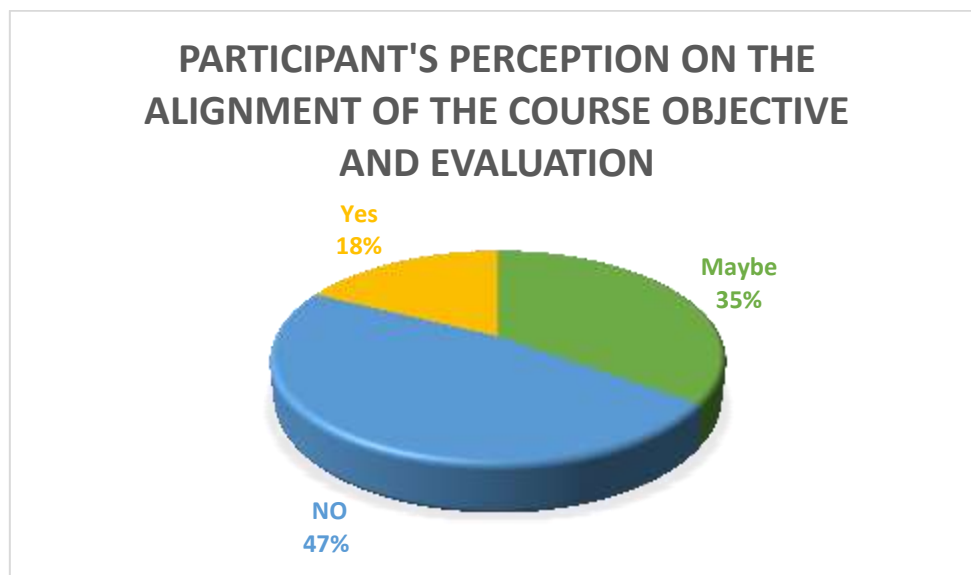
Figure 4: View on extrinsic motivation in the scope for subject analysis



The majority of the students do, however, feel that their institute didn't provide sufficient preparation window for the evaluations, thus creating more stress and suggesting the adoption of study strategies and cramming practices. 67.9% of the students view assignments as the preferred mode for assessment as they promote higher-order thinking and eliminate examination anxiety to some extent. The students, however, when asked about their preference for the evaluations, seem to provide answers which call for mixed ways of evaluations instead of every course focusing on exams. However, the students feel that the course objectives seemed to provide them

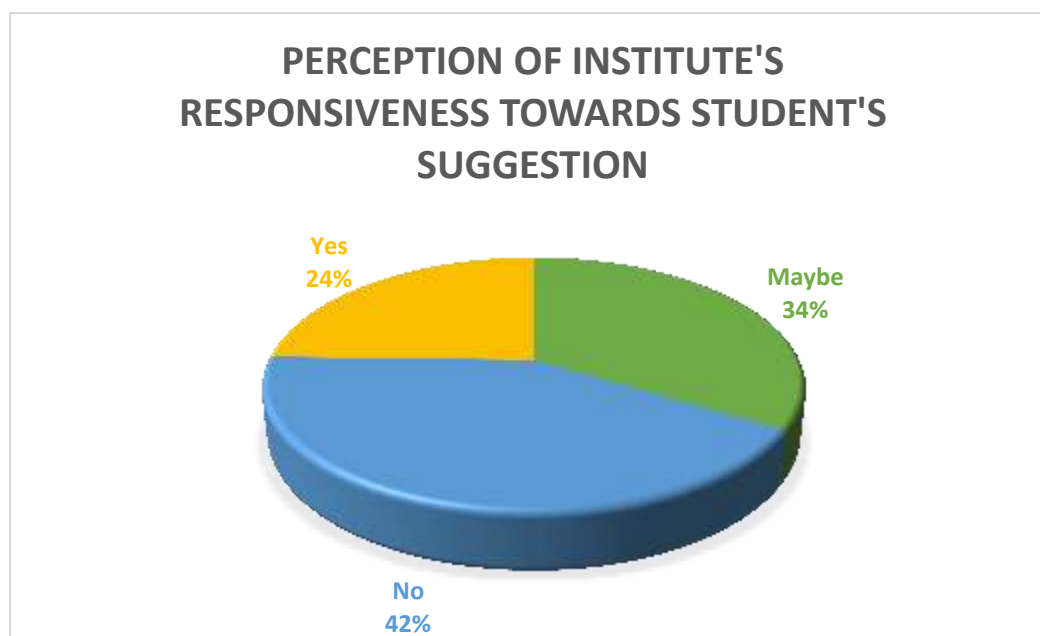
with just and fair information for future use in their professional lives. Yet, dissatisfaction is seen in the institute's chosen evaluation. Thus, when asked about suggestions, many seemed to provide practical and project-based evaluations as a preferred and more engaging path.

Figure. 5 Students' response on aligning the course outcomes and the evaluations.



A large stream of dissatisfaction and negative perception about the authority is also reflected in the questions of SRS and the institute's responsiveness to them. Though the student feels the Student Report Surveys (SRS) are indeed or at least partly reflective of the instructor and the course abilities, the institute's action is not up to the expectations.

Figure 6: Students' perception of institute responsiveness.



4. Summary and Conclusion

Previous literature suggested that a positive perception of evaluations and institutions is critical in building a nurturing and creative academic environment. Thus, breaking the monotony and negative mindset surrounding assessments is necessary. The new pedagogical approach suggests a shift to assignment-based evaluations as a favored option. Many studies have even focused on a continuous class-based assessment instead of only exams

at intervals to distribute weightage and lessen the burden of the course syllabus. The context effect on the memory performance providing an adverse impact on the examination performance had essentially been the central argument in this paper. Thus, instead of applying specific guidelines on the courses, evaluation for each should be tailored to the particular aims of the courses offered. Though each method and way of assessment creates a sufficient number of advantages and disadvantages for the evaluators, acknowledging that various assessment techniques imply and make a better evaluation of the aspects and principles of the course taught is necessary. Henceforth a varying pool of evaluation methods can create a favorable reputation for the evaluations and academics.

5. References

Love, A. J. 2010, Understanding Approaches to Evaluation. International Encyclopedia of Education, Third Edition, Elsevier, 798–807.

Struyven, K., F. Dochy, S. and Janssens, 2005, Students' perceptions about evaluation and assessment in higher education: a review. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30(4), 325–341.

Van de Watering, G., D. Gijbels, and F. Dochy, 2008, Students' assessment preferences, perceptions of assessment and their relationships to study results, *Higher Education*, 56, 645–658.

Struyven, K., F. Dochy, and S. Janssens, 2002, Students' perceptions about assessment in higher education: a review. *Education-line - British Education Index (BEI)*. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00002255.htm>

Shepard, L. A. (2019). Classroom Assessment to Support Teaching and Learning. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 683,183-200.

Kniveton, Bromley H. 1996, Student Perceptions of Assessment Methods. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 21(3), 229–237.

Hull, K., H. Lawford, S. Hood, V. Oliveira, M. Murray, M. Trempe, J. Crooks, M. Richardson and M. Jensen, 2019, Student Anxiety and Evaluation. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, 12, 23–35.